

Governors Island, Building #2  
Governors Island  
New York Harbor  
New York City  
New York County  
New York

HABS No. NY-5715-4

HABS  
NY,  
31-Govt,  
4-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, DC 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

GOVERNORS ISLAND, BUILDING #2

HABS No. NY-5715-4

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(Page 1)

Location: Northeast edge of Nolan Park, southwest of the intersection of Barry and Andes Roads, Governors Island, New York Harbor, New York, New York.

Present Owner: United States Coast Guard

Present Occupant: Captain and Mrs. M. J. O'Brien

Present Use: Residence of the Commanding Officer, United States Coast Guard, Support Center, New York

Significance: Throughout its history, this building has been a key structure on the Governors Island military post. It was probably constructed as the post's main guard house and was later used as quarters for the post's Commanding Officer, as offices, and finally as officer's quarters. It is now the home of the base Commander. Built in the years prior to the War of 1812, it is also one of the oldest structures on the Island. Although altered considerably, it still contributes to the overall small scale residential character of the Nolan Park area.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Dates of erection: The date of construction for the building is popularly believed to be the early years of the 18th century when the Island was used as a retreat for British Royal governors. The building was thought to be the home of these officials and was commonly referred to as the "Governors House." No documentation was found to substantiate this claim. Instead, the building was probably built in the years between 1805 and 1813. During those years, a great deal of construction took place on the Island with the erection of Fort Columbus, Castle Williams, South Battery and related structures outside these fortifications. An inspection report from 1863 (Lieutenant Casey, October 31, 1863) lists the date of construction for this building as 1811. The earliest reliable documented date for the building is 1813. A plan and cross section of the Island drawn by Joseph Mangin (Plates 1 and 2) illustrate the building as it stood in that year.
2. Architect: The building's architect is unknown.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The United States Army was the owner until 1966 when the Island was transferred to the United States Coast Guard.

4. Builder: The building was probably erected by troops stationed on the Island or by local civilians. Other alterations to the building were not detailed in Bender's letter. The original agreement with Stillwagon was enclosed in this letter but has since been lost.
5. Original plans and construction: Joseph Mangin's 1813 drawing (Plates 1 and 2) illustrates a two story above raised basement, cross-shaped structure with intersecting gable roofs and two story colonnaded porticoes at front and rear.
6. Additions and alterations: The earliest documented alterations to the building occurred in 1824 when the building was converted to quarters for the post Commanding Officer. On February 4th, a letter was sent to the Quartermaster General of the Army requesting permission for alterations which were estimated to cost about \$950 (Bender to Jessup, February 1824). Authorization was given on February 16th, and an agreement was made with master builder W. Stillwaggon for the work suggested by the commanding officer, Major General Gaines (Bender to Jessup, June 24, 1824). Once work began, the materials in place were found to be much more decayed than suspected, and General Gaines and the workmen suggested further improvements which consequently increased the sum needed for the work. These included making closets and enlarging and increasing the number of doors and windows which were little more than loop-holes (Ibid).

A drawing made in December 1839 (Plate 3) shows changes in the building's exterior since Mangin's 1813 plan and cross section of the Island. The roof had been changed to a combination hipped and gable roof, and the portico on the east side had been altered. By that time, the two story portico had been removed and replaced with one-story porches on each floor. A one-story rectangular addition had also been built at the southwest corner of the building. The addition with horizontal wood siding is shown in an 1864 photograph (Plate 4). These may have been among the changes made in the 1824 conversion.

Later 19th century photographs illustrate further changes in the building's appearance. In an 1864 photograph of the east facade (Plate 5), the vertical balusters on the first story porch had been replaced by diagonal members, and a one story board-and-batten addition had been built at the basement level. A second undated photograph probably taken between ca. 1895 and 1904 (Plate 6) shows that the balusters of the second story porch on the east side were identical to those on the first story. The basement addition had been removed and replaced by a more substantial one-story above basement brick and board-and-batten

addition with shed roof. A hood with ornamental iron cresting and decorative brackets had been placed above the south door. This door had obviously replaced the window that is just barely discernable behind the trees on the earlier photograph. The horizontal siding covering the walls of the small addition in the southwest corner had been replaced by vertical board-and-batten and an identical addition had been made in the northwest corner (Plate 7). A more decorative balustrade had replaced the one shown on the earlier photograph.

The next documented alteration occurred in the late 1930s during extensive work done on the Island by the Works Progress Administration. The 19th century additions in the corners of the building and the front and rear porches were removed. A new one-story addition which wrapped around the northeast and south sides of the building was made. A new one-story porch with Ionic columns was built on the west facade. Windows were cut on the south and west sides, and an existing second-story door was replaced by a window on the east side. The existing brick chimney was replaced. On the interior, a new stairway was placed in the southeast corner of the original building. Whether the stairway was moved from its original location at this time is uncertain. The extent of changes in the floor plan is also uncertain since the building had been converted from offices to officers' housing at least by 1922. Drawings labelled Alterations and Additions (See Photographs NY-5715-4-3 through NY-5715-4-10 following Bibliography) on file in the Facilities Engineering Division, Governors Island document the work done during the late 1930s.

#### B. Historical Context:

The building has had a long and varied history. It was probably constructed as the post's main guard house and was labelled in this use on Mangin's 1813 plan of the Island (Plates 1 and 2). By the mid 1820s, new quarters were needed for the post's Commanding Officer to replace unsuitable quarters elsewhere on the Island. The guard house was converted to this purpose in 1824 by master builder W. Stillwaggon (Bender to Jesup, June 24, 1824). The building apparently served as both office and residence for the Commanding Officer. At least by the early 1830s, the building was considered unsuitable for this purpose. The interior plan was felt to be inconvenient. Moisture from storms had penetrated the walls, damaging interior plaster and making the rooms uncomfortable (Stanton to Jesup, June 30, 1831). Nevertheless, the building continued to be used as quarters for the Commanding Officer until the early 1840s when new quarters were built. Soon afterwards the building probably reverted to its original use as a guard house. An 1863 inspection report (Lieutenant Casey, October 31, 1863) listed the post guard house in

the building's basement. The five rooms on the first and second floors contained the offices of the Commanding Officer and the Adjutant. A report five years later (Surgeon General's Office, 1868, p. 15) noted that no prisoners were confined in the basement as did subsequent reports from 1870 (Circular No. 4, 1870, p. 30) and 1875 (Circular No. 8, 1875, p. 16). Between 1875 and 1882, the offices of the Post Commander and Adjutant were moved elsewhere on the Island. In 1882, the building housed the offices of the Chief Quartermaster and Chief Paymaster of the Division of the Atlantic and the Department of the East. The main guard house, which had been thoroughly repaired in the previous year, remained in the basement of the building (Post Quartermaster to Quartermaster General, April 8, 1882). Three years later the post Commander and the Chief and Local Paymasters shared the office space in the building (Post Quartermaster to Quartermaster General, April 30, 1885). The building continued to be used as the guard house at least until 1908 and as post headquarters until ca. 1922 (Smith, 1923, p. 134). At that time, the building was converted to a residence (Ibid, p. 140), presumably that of the post Commander. The Army continued to use the building as quarters for the post Commander until transfer of the Island to the United States Coast Guard in 1966. Since then, the house has been occupied by the base Commander.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

The interior of the structure was not accessible, so only the exterior will be discussed below.

### A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Since its construction, this cross-shaped, two-story brick building has undergone considerable change. It is essentially Georgian in character with projecting pedimented central pavilion. The one-story portico exhibits further classical detailing in the columns and pilasters. The one-story above basement addition which wraps around the north and east sides of the house, largely obscures the cross-shape at the rear of the house. Despite numerous changes in its appearance and the poor methods of replacing deteriorated brickwork, the house still contributes to the small-scale residential character of the Nolan Park area.
2. Condition of fabric: The building is well maintained and is in good condition on the exterior. However, improper replacement of brick and pointing is evident on all sides of the original portion of the house.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The main block or original portion of the house is cross shaped and is two stories above a raised basement. The west or front facade is five bays wide with the three central bays in the west pavilion. A one-story above basement wing on the north side wraps around the east side as a basement garage and open terrace on the first floor. The northeast wing has a polygonal bay on the east side. A small one-story addition fills the space in the southeast corner of the main block. The entire house measures 49' 11" x 49' 8".
2. Foundations: The foundation of the main block is stone. The wings have a brick foundation 8"-12" thick on concrete footings.
3. Walls: The walls of the main block are red brick laid in Flemish bond with queen closers at the corners. Extensive areas of new brickwork are evident on all facades where deteriorated brick has been replaced. Walls on the northeast and south wings are dark yellow and red brick laid in 5-1 common bond. The gable ends of the main block on the east and west sides are stuccoed. The northeast wing has two precast brownstone belt courses, one at the second floor level and the other below the sills of the second story windows. The southeast addition has a single precast belt course at the first floor level.
4. Structural systems and framing: Exterior walls of the main block are masonry load bearing 2' 1" thick on the first floor and 1' 8" on the second. Exterior walls of the wings are masonry load bearing 1' thick on the north wing and 8" on the south. Interior partition walls are 4". Floor joists are 3" x 10", 16" on center.
5. Porches stoops and balconies: A small one-story entrance portico of two wooden Ionic columns supporting an entablature with panelled soffit and denticulated cornice is located in the center bay on the west side. Two Doric pilasters in antis flank the door. Precast stone steps are on the north and south sides of the porch. A simple metal balustrade extends along the western edge of the steps and porch. A metal and frosted glass light fixture hangs from the porch ceiling. Also on the west side of the house, cement steps with plain metal balustrade lead to the entrance of the northeast wing.

On the east side, an open terrace above the basement garage spans the width of the east pavilion of the main block. The terrace is encompassed by a low brick wall with a precast stone cap and a wrought iron balustrade with a geometric motif in the center.

Access to the terrace from the ground level is by a set of precast stone steps with wrought iron rail entered through an arched brick opening. The terrace floor is red quarry tile.

6. Chimneys: A single red brick chimney laid in 5-1 common bond with corbelled brick and cement cap is situated to the south of the center ridge in the south arm of the main block.

7. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors:

On the west side, the entrance is a recessed six panelled wooden door with four-light transom. The door is flanked by Doric pilasters. The west and north entrances to the northeast wing are wooden single panelled doors with nine panes and four-light transoms. Each is topped by segmental brick arches. On the east side, a similar door flanked by fluted pilasters with acanthus leaf capitals supporting an entablature with denticulated cornice opens onto the terrace. A set of French doors with a brick segmental arch provides access to the terrace on the north. At ground level, an arched opening embellished with a keystone leads to the terrace steps.

- b. Windows: Windows are typically six-over-six-light double hung sash with either flat arches or more pronounced segmental arches. Each has a stone or precast stone lug sill. First and second story windows on the north side of the west pavilion of the main block and the second story window on the south above the southeast addition have been infilled with brick. Half-round casement windows in the west and east gable ends have been replaced by lowered vents.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The main block has a hipped roof intersected on the east and west by gable roofs. The northeast wing has a shallow polygonal roof on the east and a sloping roof on the north. The roof on the southeast addition is flat. All are covered with asphalt shingles.
  - b. Cornice, eaves: A pronounced wooden cornice contains the gutter.

C. Site:

1. Setting:

The house located at the corner of Barry and Andes Roads, faces west onto Nolan Park, a landscaped open space crisscrossed by brick sidewalks and surrounded by small-scale 19th and early 20th century houses. Also to the west of the house is a two-story brick structure (Building #25) containing offices. A brick sidewalk on the west is expanded into walkways leading to the western entrance on the south addition and to the rear yard on the south. The ground on the north and east sides slopes down toward the road. A stone wall topped by brick planters encloses much of the rear yard. The south portion of the rear yard is paved with brick and a cobbled driveway, that is an extension of the cobbled road behind the house, leads toward the garage in the southeast corner of the house. The yard on all four sides of the house is planted with grass, trees and shrubbery.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural Drawings:

The following documents are in the Cartographic and Architectural Branch of the National Archives, Record Group 77, Maps and Plans of the Office of the Chief of Engineers.

Map of the Islands and Military Points in the Harbor of New York, their Distances and Situations and Profiles through Governors, Bedloes and Ellis Island, and the works thereon. Joseph Mangin. 1813. Fortification File, Fort Columbus, Drawer 36, sheet 20. Earliest drawing illustrating the building.

Sheet No. 8. Details of Buildings on Governors Island. December 1839. Drawer 37, sheet 20. Illustrates east or rear facade and floor plans.

Drawings documenting alterations made to the building during the late 1930s are on file in the U.S. Coast Guard Support Center, New York Facilities Engineering Office, Governors Island.

Alterations and Additions - West Elevation, February 1939.

Alterations and Additions - East Elevation, February 1939.

Alterations and Additions - North Elevation, February 1939.

Alterations and Additions - South Elevation, February 1939.



Alterations and Additions - Basement Floor Plan, February 1939.

Alterations and Additions - First Floor Plan, February 1939.

Alterations and Additions - Second Floor Plan, February 1939.

Alterations and Additions - Living Room, February 1939.

West Entrance and Living Room, March 1939.

B. Early Views:

The following photographs are in the Still Picture Branch of the National Archives, Record Group 165, Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs.

View from the southeast, 1864. 165-C-1090.

View from the southwest, 1864. 165-C-237.

View from the southeast, ca. 1895-1904. 165-FF-71-590.

View from the west, ca. 1895-1904. 165-FF-71-591

C. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

The following are in the Navy and Old Army Branch of the National Archives, Record Group 92, Office of the Quartermaster General, Consolidated Correspondence File, 1794-1915.

Inspection report made on public Buildings, Officers and Troop Quarters at Fort Columbus New York Harbor on the 31st day of October 1863 by 1st Lieut. James L. Casey 5th Infantry, Acting Assistant Quartermaster, U.S. Army, Box 191, Fort Columbus. Refers to repairs needed.

George Bender to Brigadier General Thomas Jessup, February 4, 1824. Box 346, Governors Island. Request for authorization to alter the building for use as quarters for the post Commanding Officer.

George Bender to Brigadier General Thomas Jessup, June 24, 1824. [States that more alterations were needed than initially planned and names W. Stillwaggon as the local builder responsible for the changes.]

Major Henry Stanton to Major General Thomas Jessup, June 30, 1831. Box 346, Governors Island. Details condition of the building and repairs needed.

Office of the Post Quartermaster to the Quartermaster General, U.S. Army, April 8, 1882. Box 191, Fort Columbus. Lists occupants, building condition and necessary repairs.

Office of the Post Quartermaster to the Quartermaster General, U.S. Army, April 30, 1885. Box 345, Governors Island. Lists occupants, repairs made over the previous year and repairs still needed.

Office of the Post Quartermaster to the Quartermaster General, U.S. Army, April 2, 1886. Box 345, Governors Island. Lists Occupants, repairs made during the previous year, building condition and necessary repairs.

2. Secondary and published sources:

U.S. Surgeon General's Office. Governors Island, Record of Medical History of the Post. Washington, D.C.: Medical Department, U.S. Army, May 14, 1868. Gives detailed description of the interior plan and uses.

\_\_\_\_\_. Circular No. 4. A Report on Barracks and Hospitals with Descriptions of Military Posts. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1870. Lists occupants of the building.

\_\_\_\_\_. Circular No. 8. A Report on the Hygiene of the United States Army, with Descriptions of Military Posts. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1875. Lists occupants of the building.

Smith, Edmund Banks. Governor's Island: Its Military History Under Three Flags, 1637-1922. New York: Valentines Manual Inc., 1923.

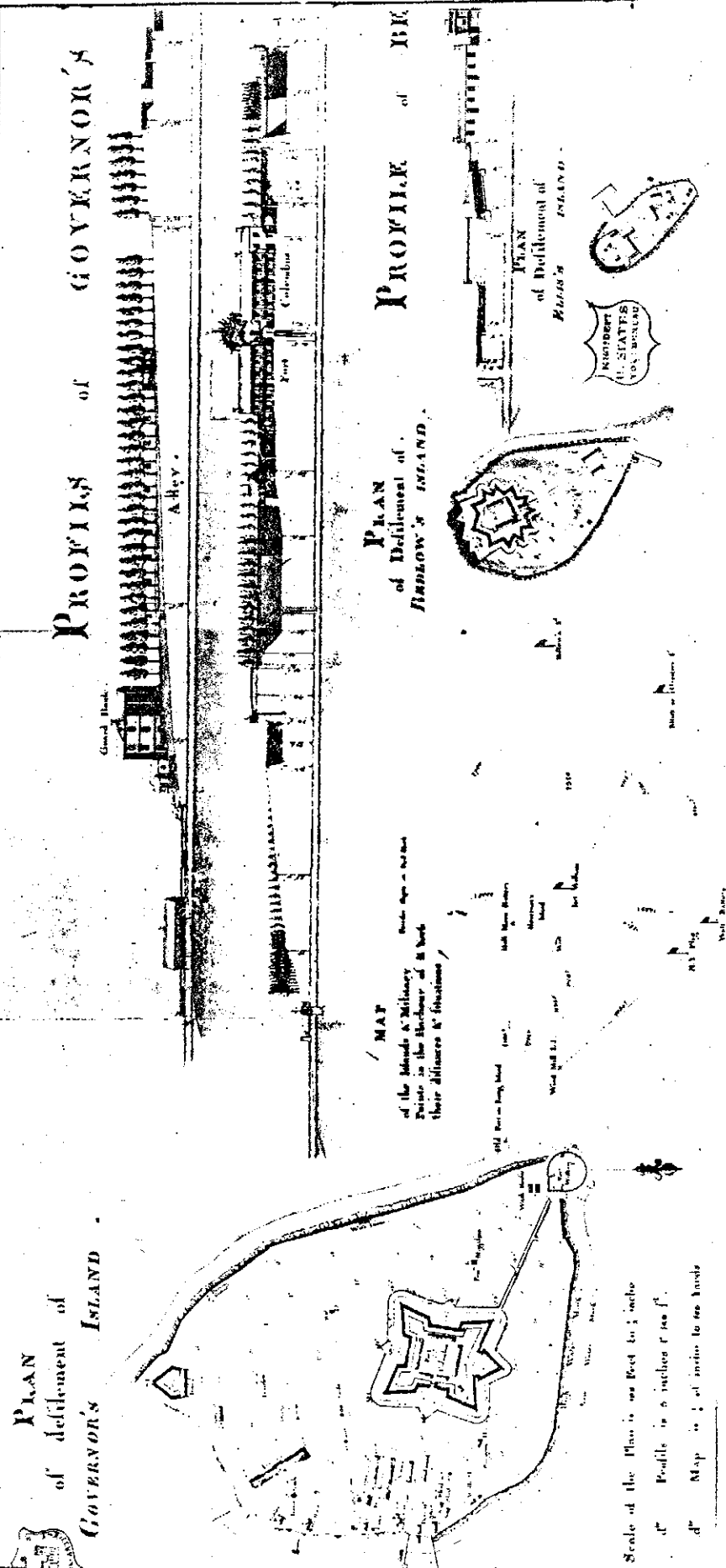


Plate 1  
Photocopy of a Drawing of Governors Island  
National Archives, Architecture and Cartographic Branch  
Record Group 77-Fortifications File  
Fort Columbus, Governors Island, N.Y., Drawer 36, sheet 20  
Plan of Defilement of Governors Island

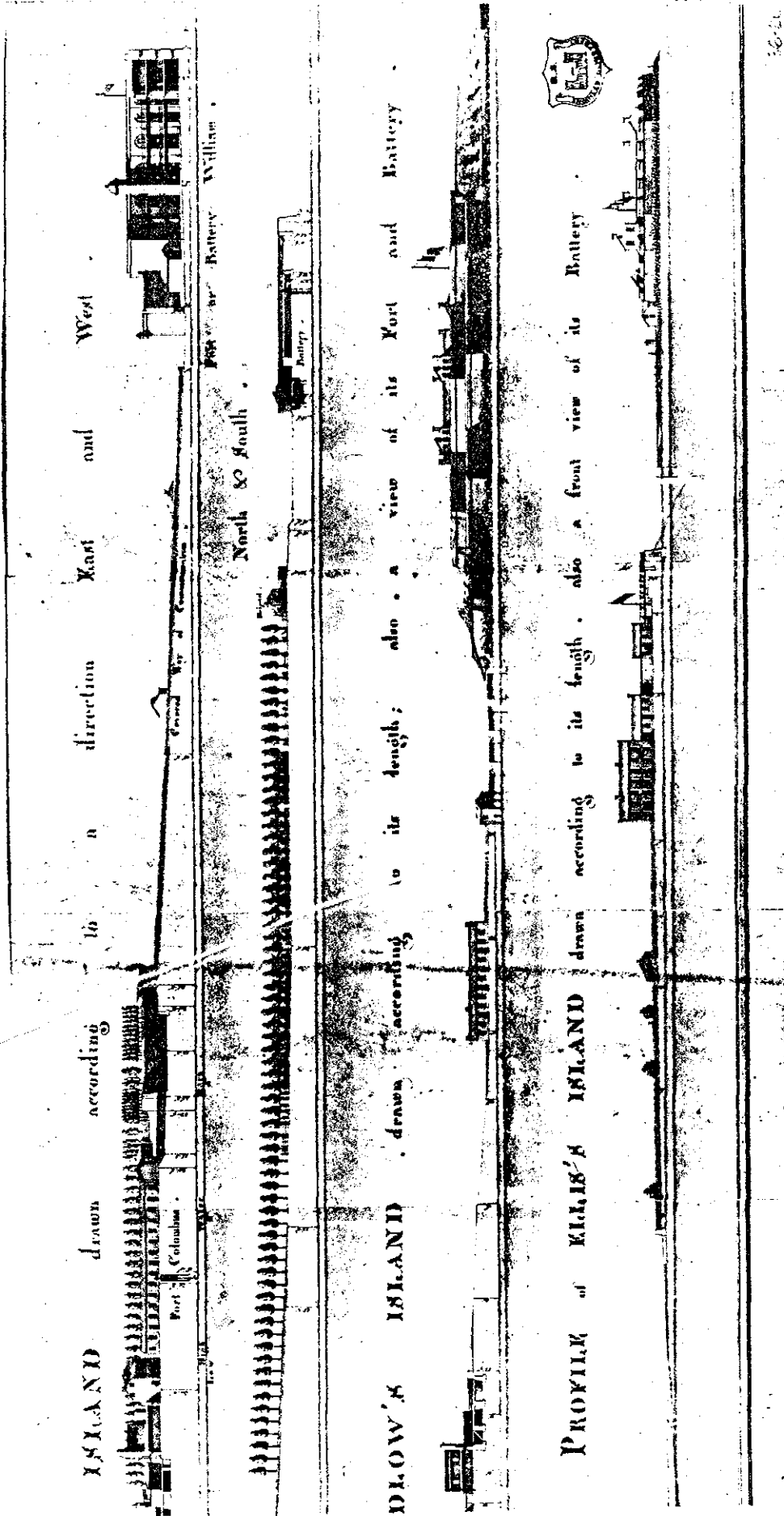


Plate 2

Photocopy of a Drawing of Governors Island  
National Archives, Architecture and Cartographic Branch  
Record Group 77-Fortifications File  
Fort Columbus, Governors Island, N.Y., Drawer 36, sheet 20  
Plan of Defilement of Governors Island

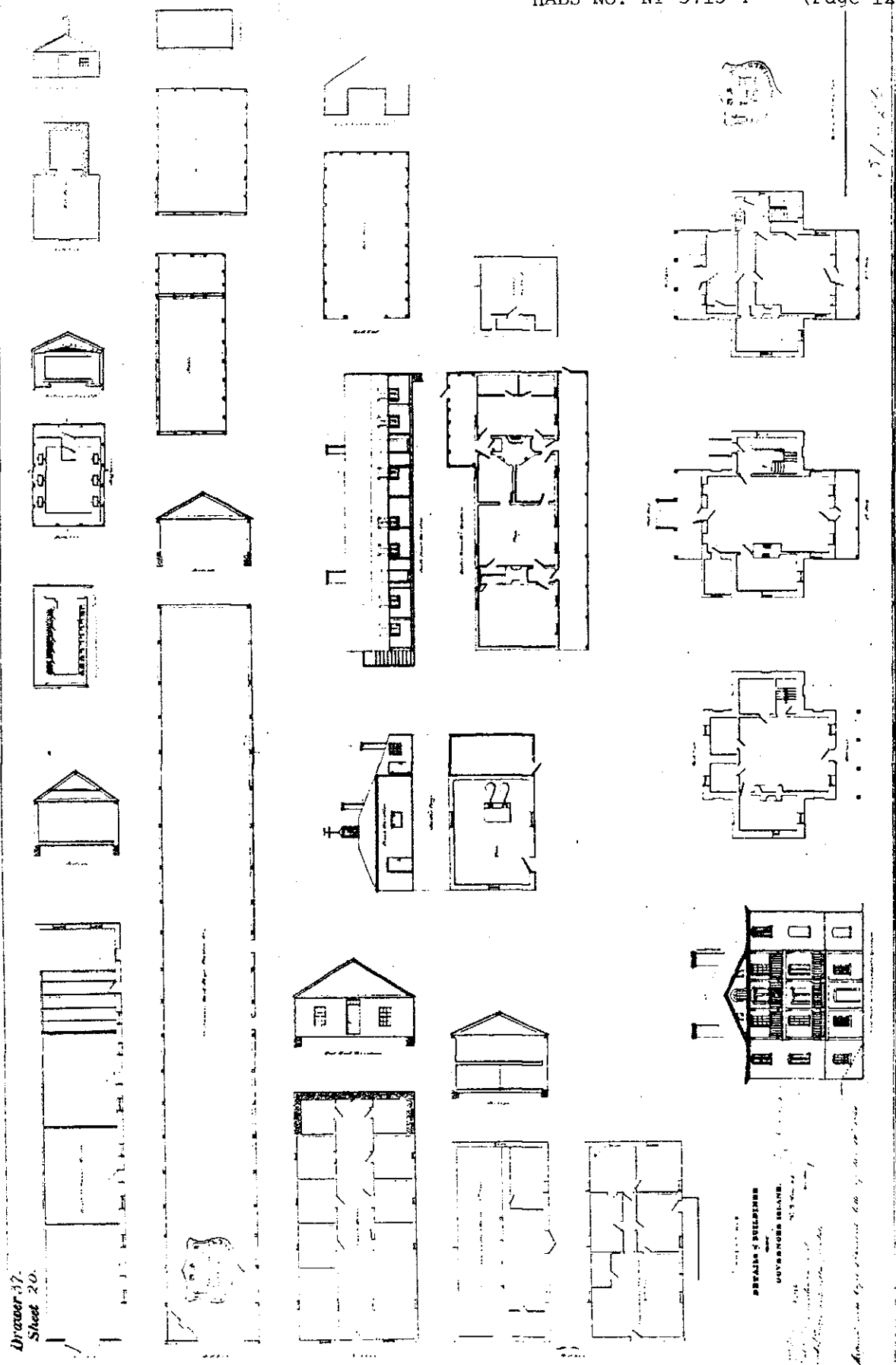


Plate 3

Photocopy of Plans of Details of Various Buildings on Governors Island  
 National Archives, Architecture and Cartographic File  
 Record Group 77-Fortifications File  
 Fort Columbus, Governors Island, N.Y., Drawer 37, sheet 20  
 Drawn by William S. Walter, December 1839



Plate 4  
Reproduction of Photograph of Quarters 2  
National Archives, Still Pictures Branch  
Record Group 165-C-1090  
North Side  
Photographer unknown, 1864

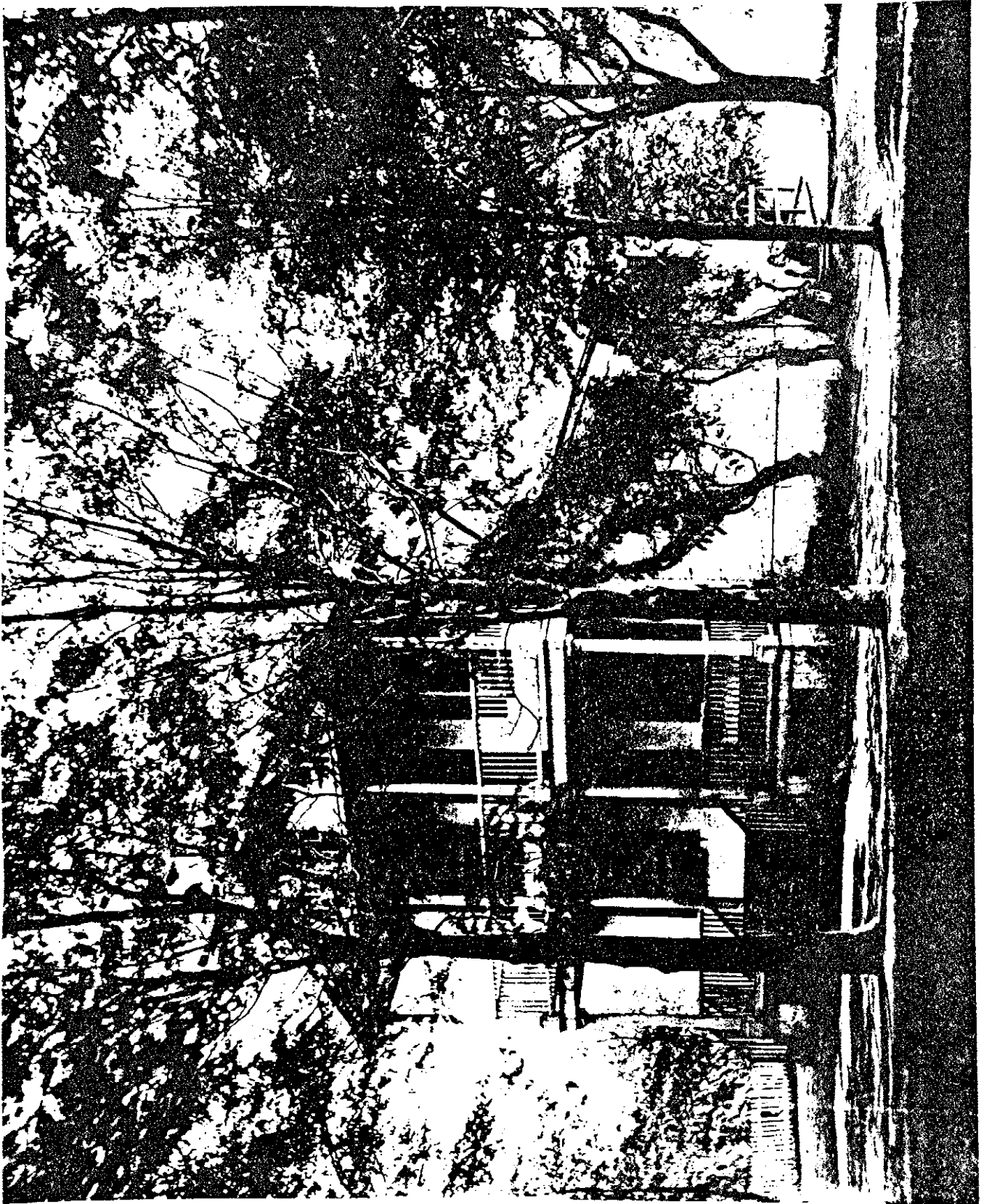


Plate 5  
Reproduction of Photograph of Quarters 2  
National Archives, Still Pictures Branch  
Record Group 165-C-237  
West Front from Southwest  
Photographer unknown, 1864

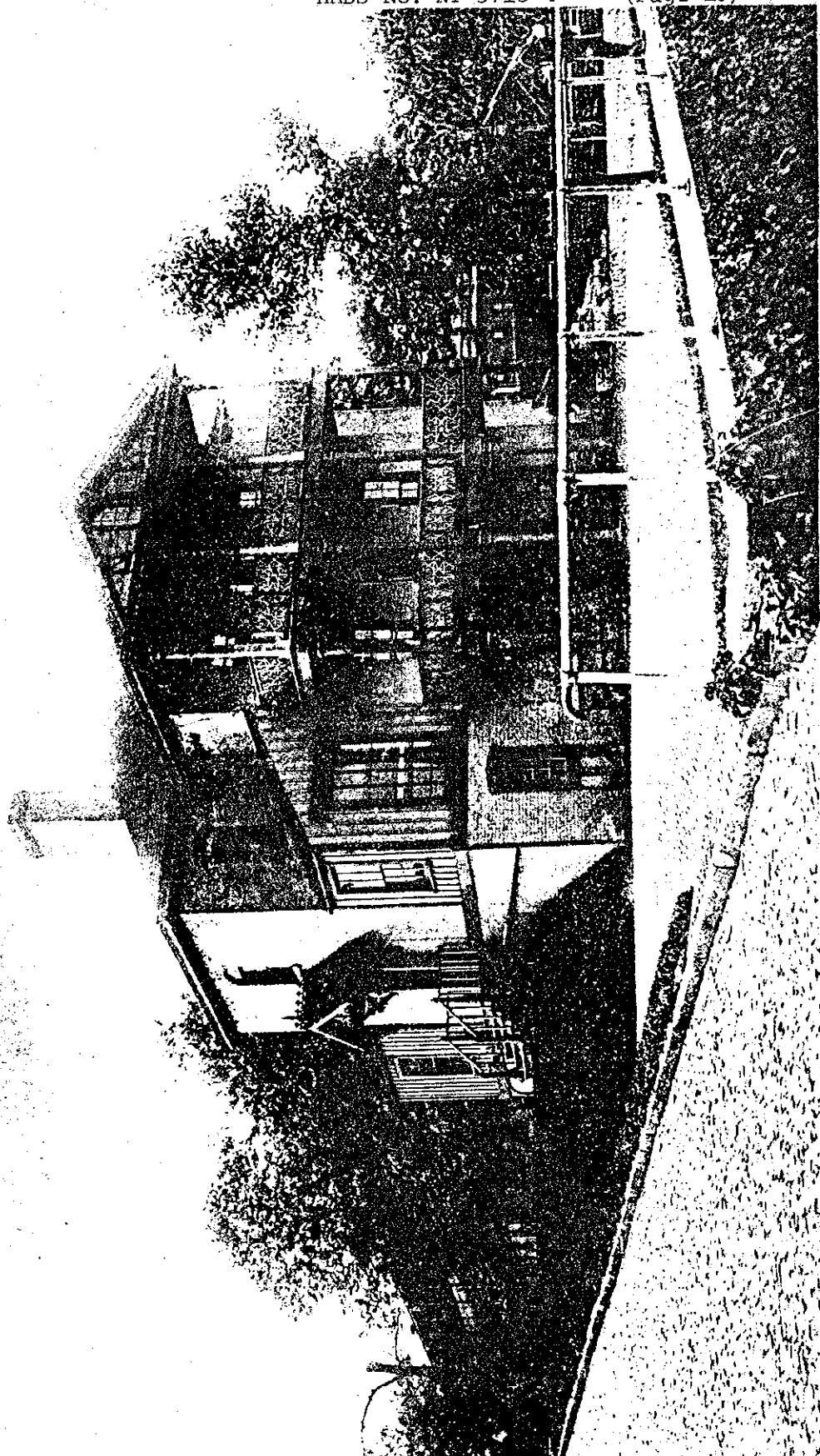


Plate 6

Reproduction of Photograph of Quarters 2  
National Archives, Still Pictures Branch  
Record Group 165-Fortifications File, 7L-1  
Records of the War Department, General Staff  
Prints: American Forts, 1860-1914  
View of North Side from Northeast  
Date and Photographer unknown



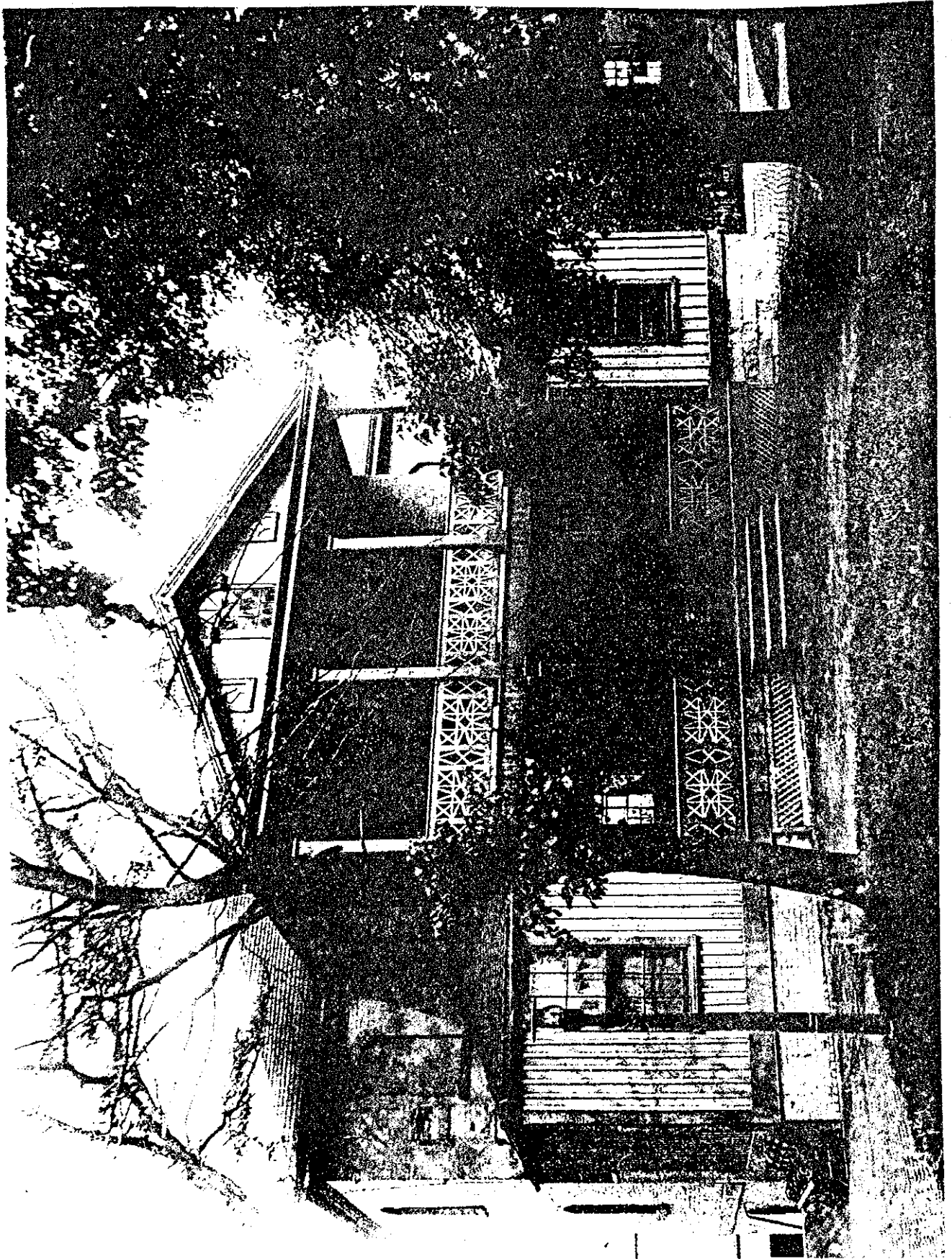


Plate 7

Reproduction of Photograph of Quarters 2  
National Archives, Still Pictures Branch  
Record Group 165-Fortifications File, 7L-1  
Records of War Department, General Staff  
Prints: American Forts, 1860-1914  
View of West Front  
Date and Photographer unknown

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER) at the request of the United States Coast Guard, Third Coast Guard District, Governors Island, New York, who funded the project. The field work was accomplished during the summers of 1982 and 1983. The historic structures inventory, a National Historic Landmark District nomination and the documentation of five properties were completed in 1984. A three-volume report and inventory cards containing the results of the historic structures inventory have been transmitted to the Library of Congress as field records under HABS No. NY-5715. The National Historic Landmark District nomination was submitted and acted upon favorably by the National Park System Advisory Board in October of 1984.

Sally Kress Tompkins, Deputy Chief of HABS/HAER, was project manager. John Burns, AIA and S. Allen Chambers both of the HABS staff provided technical assistance and review; Jet Lowe, HAER staff photographer, completed the large format photography; Blanche Higgins, historian, and David Broderson of Cornell University completed the historic structures inventory during the summer of 1982; Barbara Hightower, historian, developed the HABS documentation during the summer of 1983; Karin Madison of the HABS/HAER staff assisted in the production of the report and provided photographic control. Paige George of the University of Virginia did the Governors Island map and title sheet. Jay Silberman, Environmental Specialist, District Planning Office, Third Coast Guard District, Governors Island, served as manager and coordinator of the project for the U.S. Coast Guard.